

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

Please cancel claims 1-41 and insert new claims 42-83.

42. (New) A method of packaging a fresh product including the steps of:
harvesting the product while fresh;
treating the product while substantially fresh from harvest in order to enhance the storage properties of the product;
packaging the product into a package which extends the shelf life of the product;
characterized in that the package is microwavable such that the produce can be heated in a microwave while in the package so as to be ready for serving directly to the consumer from the package, and in that there is naturally occurring movement of gases within the package thereby allowing interaction to take place between the product located within the package and gases in the atmosphere in order to eliminate the need for mechanical or chemical interference of the product in the package.

43. (New) A method according to claim 42, characterized in that heating of the product includes steaming the product in the microwavable package using a microwave and serving the package onto the table ready for consumption.

44. (New) A method according to claim 42, characterized in that the method further includes treating the fresh or recently picked or harvested product with one or more cleaning steps to enhance the organoleptic and/or storage properties of the product.

45. (New) A method according to claim 44, characterized in that the cleaning step includes contacting the product with a cleaning preparation that includes soaps, Neem oil or the like.

46. (New) A method according to claim 44, characterized in that the cleaning step includes the use of ozone, ultrasonic techniques, sanitizers, chlorine or the like, either alone or in combination.

47. (New) A method according to claim 44, characterized in that the cleaning treatment involves removal or elimination of thrip and/or other unwanted insect, disease condition or the like.

48. (New) A package containing a product when made in accordance with the process of claim 42.

49. (New) A method according to claim 42, characterized in that the product comprises fresh fruit or vegetables.

50. (New) A method according to claim 49, characterized in that the fresh fruit or vegetable is asparagus.

51. (New) A method according to claim 50, characterized in that the asparagus is fresh asparagus having substantially no additives or artificial materials added to it either before, during or after processing.

52. (New) A method according to claim 48, characterized in that the package comprises a punnet, container or tray.

53. (New) A method according to claim 52, characterized in that the punnet is made from a plastics or synthetic material or a combination thereof.

54. (New) A method according to claim 53, characterized in that the punnet includes a base and a lid, wherein the base is made from a propylene-containing material.

55. (New) A method according to claim 54, characterized in that the polypropylene base has been adapted or modified for specific use with fresh fruit or vegetables.

56. (New) A method according to claim 52, characterized in that the punnet has a modified atmosphere, a modified micro-atmosphere or is a Modified Interactive punnet.

57. (New) A method according to claim 56, characterized in that the punnet is a Modified Interactive punnet of the type allowing flow through of gases associated with at least one of the products or atmosphere of the punnet to enhance at least one of the storage or organoleptic properties of the product.

58. (New) A method according to claim 54, characterized in that the lid is made from a polypropylene material, a polyvinyl chloride material or a polyethylene teraphthalate material.

59. (New) A method according to claim 54, characterized in that the lid and base of the package is made from a polypropylene-containing material.

60. (New) A method according to claim 52, characterized in that the package creates naturally occurring movement of gases across and through the walls and base of the punnet, thereby allowing interaction to take place between the product located within the package and gases in the atmosphere within the package in order to eliminate the need for mechanical or chemical interference or modification of the product.

61. (New) A method according to claim 60, characterized in that the gases in the atmosphere include oxygen, carbon dioxide, water vapor or the like.

62. (New) A method according to claim 61, characterized in that the gases in the atmosphere include oxygen of greater than 5%, carbon dioxide up to 10%.

63. (New) A method according to claim 62, characterized in that the amount of oxygen is between 5% and 20%, and the amount of carbon dioxide is between 5% and 9%.

64. (New) A method according to claim 50, characterized in that the asparagus packed in accordance with the present invention using the package of the present invention remains fresh for up to about six weeks.

65. (New) A method according to claim 50, characterized in that the asparagus packed in accordance with the present invention using the package of the present invention remains fresh for up to about 20 days.

66. (New) A method according to claim 50, characterized in that the asparagus packed in accordance with the present invention using the package of the present invention remains fresh for up to about 14 days.

67. (New) A method according to claim 42, characterized in that the package enhances nutrient retention and reduces weight loss of the product during transportation, storage and distribution to less than about 1%.

68. (New) A method according to claim 48, characterized in that the method and package provides pre-paced, ready-to-eat, eat-and serve convenience foods that can be stored, distributed,

transported, cooked, heated or the like in the same package with substantially no adverse effects on the product in the package.

69. (New) A method according to claim 48, characterized in that the package includes a ready-to-serve product in combination with a sauce sachet.

70. (New) A method according to claim 52, characterized in that the punnet is a free standing punnet or a hang-cell pack.

71. (New) A method according to claim 50, characterized in that the asparagus useful in the packaging is non-export quality.

72. (New) A method according to claim 50, characterized in that the spears of asparagus are cut to a predetermined or preselected length.

73. (New) A method according to claim 72, characterized in that after cutting, the length of asparagus are washed.

74. (New) A method according to claim 73, characterized in that after washing, the spears of asparagus are further treated to increase their storage properties, appearance or other properties by being chill-washed.

75. (New) A method according to claim 74, in which the treated asparagus spears are dewatered using a current of gas.

76. (New) A method according to claim 50, characterized in that the asparagus is provided in one or more cut forms or in a reduced size form, including pieces, chunks, lumps, slices, lengths or spears.

77. (New) A method according to claim 76, characterized in that the asparagus is cut to a predetermined size to fit into the package.

78. (New) A method according to claim 76, characterized in that the size of the asparagus is determined by the diameter of the spears and can be controlled so that the tips of the asparagus need to be bigger than the more solid stem pieces.

79. (New) A method according to claim 42, characterized in that the fresh product is selected from the group consisting of nuts, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, mushrooms, beans, grapes and citrus fruits.

80. (New) A method according to claim 48, characterized in that the packages are provided with tamper-proof or tamper-evident devices.

81. (New) A method according to claim 42, characterized in that the fresh product is subjected to a dewatering step.

82. (New) A method according to claim 81, characterized in that the dewatering step is effected by using at least one of a current of air, spin drying, or a combination of both.

83. (New) A method according to claim 81, characterized in that excess moisture is removed from the fresh product by the dewatering step.